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ABSTRACT

Group strategies--group discussion, feedback, collaboration--seem so widely used in postsecondary writing as to have attained the status of lore. In seeking pedagogical community, writing teachers too often gloss over or deny the reality of competing voices. To understand the traditional appeal of the trope "community" for American educational institutions, it must be noted how tightly, in forming the trope, the ideology of democracy is yoked to the belief in cohesion through education. Historical studies of national literacy movements have amply shown that universal schooling is the most important underlying mechanism by which modern societies seek to create social cohesion. However, because discourse is power, membership in a discourse community confers power and privilege. Some are included, some are left out, unvoiced and disempowered. One of postmodernism's clearest tenets is the power of discourse to enact hegemony, to insist upon acquiescence to the dominant discourses of a culture and to exclude voices that are different or other. Various efforts have been made to rescue the idea of community in the classroom in a postmodern age, most notably by Kenneth Bruffee and David Bleich. Also, feminists such as Carol Gilligan and Mary Belenky, similarly, have suggested dialogic pedagogy of collaboration intended as an alternative to a more oppositional, argumentative model. However, these theorists do not adequately discuss the sources and nature of the cohesion that could keep classroom groups functioning while preserving diversity. This is a fundamental question that theorists must address--how can students in a pluralistic classroom be motivated to form a cohesive whole? (Contains 5 notes and 19 references.) (TB)

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David Foster

Rescuing Com..nunity: Sociality and Cohesion in Writing Groups

ED 384 890

There is something odd about the current status of group pedagogy in the teaching of postsecondary writing. On the one hand, group strategies--group discussion, feedback, collaboration--seem so widely used as to have attained the status of lore. In recent decades they have been repeatedly elaborated in journals and convention programs and illuminatingly theorized and historicized.[1] These discussions have generally identified group strategies as pedagogical functions of the idea of "community." Its values of mutuality and collectivity seem transparent and beyond critique, for who could gainsay the importance of learning to work and share with others? The very terms seem trite and worn smooth with usage. Like listening to the teacher and doing homework, sharing in groups speaks to the very deepest instincts of democratic education.

Yet increasingly, even as their use is legitimated, group strategies are being sharply attacked, precisely because of their grounding in the communitarian idea. Group teaching strategies are represented as politically irresponsible or epistemologically dysfunctional, depending on the attacker's perspective. But while theorists are picking fights with each other, practitioners continue doggedly using group strategies when it suits them. Of course one might say it has always been thus. Theory naturally runs a lap or two ahead of praxis, but praxis always catches up eventually. So it should not be surprising to see theorists standing about tensely, shirttails out, breathing heavily and glaring at one another, while bystanding practitioners go serenely about their business of using group strategies on Mondays and Fridays.

Though this is perhaps as true as any truism generally is, it doesn't help much. For these criticisms aim a knife at the heart of a very popular pedagogy. Yet the well-armed critics show no inclination to compromise. And those of us who frequently use group strategies, operating out of an intuitive confidence in our positive experiences with them, feel vulnerable to theorists' scolding. We fret: what the heck are they talking about? should we listen more closely? where do recent theorizing about group practices in writing--especially the critiques--really point? Can we go there?

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An agenda of political and social change informs the sharpest critiques. They are based sometimes upon materialist and/or transformationalist ideologies, sometimes upon an activist multiculturalism. Often these approaches are combined in the argument that communal pedagogy fails to address the material realities of power relations and/or cultural and social "difference."[2] In seeking pedagogical community, it is argued, writing teachers too often gloss over or deny the reality of competing voices. As Carrie Shively Leverentz puts it, for example, "knowledge-making communities ignore or erase difference in order to maintain a single, authoritative, 'normal' discourse"(168). That is, writing teachers tend to posit a monolithic "community" in their classrooms as they seek to draw students together in sharing and collaborative work. To critics this enforced communitarianism enacts the hegemony of the dominant culture and class, ignores unequal power relations within society and the academy, and precludes confronting fundamental inequities of our society. In this view, a communal pedagogy in the hands of well-meaning middle-class liberal teachers is--if not synonomous with hegemony--at least its ready and potent instrument. For these critics the traditional liberal concept of community as a means of opening social and economic opportunity becomes a covert form of social exclusion and dominance.

Thus the term "community" has now come to signify in conflicting ways. Supporters find positive meaning in the sociality of communal experiences. Critics, however, read in communal experience group oppressiveness and the denial of difference. The critics assert that "community," as presently conceived and practiced in writing classrooms, is inherently inequitable and oppressive. In so doing they pose an important challenge to those of us who rely on group strategies in the classroom. That challenge is to look more closely at the complex ways in which, under the rubric of "community," we justify and rationalize group strategies in the classroom. Indeed, the term "community" has become a familiar trope in discussions of group pedagogy in writing, a complex rhetorical construct brought into play in nearly every serious discussion--pro or con--of group pedagogy in writing. The critics do an important service in contesting the received interpretations of this trope, and in challenging the group teaching strategies rationalized by it. Further efforts to defend group pedagogy by calling up the incantatory power of this trope

are (it seems to me) no longer of much value without a deliberate, careful look at where we now stand on the matter. Instead of defending reactively, we should review the current standing of group pedagogy--and revalue it if we can--in clear and justifiable ways. We need to take a new look at the problems--for the critiques have indeed (in that overused phrase) problematized the matter--and explore how our practitioners' confidence in group pedagogy might be grounded and articulated.

It is not my purpose here to examine the effectiveness of particular group strategies. Rather, I want to look briefly at the range of justifications by which group pedagogy is rationalized today. Then I'd like to consider the gist of the critiques and some recent responses to them. In the process I'll try to address several crucial questions. First, what is the nature of the traditional connection between certain constructs of "community" and group pedagogy? What is there in this connection that seems to make it vulnerable to critique? Are recent efforts to harmonize these critiques with popular practice convincing? Why or why not, and where do we go from here?

I begin the following discussion with the proposition that the real though unacknowledged target of these critiques is the concept of cohesion in group theory and practice. I define social cohesion as the capacity of a group to create for its members satisfying experiences of commonality and identity-formation. As I will show, cohesion so defined emerges as the characteristic though unarticulated marker of the term "community," as it is customarily constructed in pedagogical terms. In this usage cohesion is presented both as a moral norm and a structural function. It has a moral spin in terms of its tributary values of tolerance and acceptance. It can be defined as a process in terms of its facilitation of the dynamics of coherence or group formation. Articulated in terms of its understood functions--"equality" and "participation"--cohesion informs and animates "community" as a trope. Around cohesion the rhetoric of community forms an enthymemic circle. A community holds together because its members are cohesive; cohesiveness depends upon group members' assumption of equality and willing participation; equality and participation are inculcated by group pedagogy; thus group pedagogy builds community.

But this traditional interpretation of "community" collides with a very different, postmodern version based upon a pluralist paradigm of

competing, conflicting voices. Recent political and social critiques of collaborative strategy are generated by a deep distrust of that very ideal of cohesion which has given traditional justifications of community their authority.

THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNAL PEDAGOGY IN WRITING

Like Henry VIII's outriders banging down the doors of sixteenth century monasteries, the agents of postmodern thought have invaded and sacked a number of sacred keeps of twentieth century culture. The sanctuary perhaps most brutally assaulted is that in which we stood to worship the text of liberal progress through cooperative socialization. Since the founding of the republic the power of community--the sense that we all have a stake in the common welfare--has been preached from every pulpit, secular and religious. The rhetoric of American nationhood is deeply familiar. Though we may differ widely in our sense of who's included in "our" community, our educational tradition teaches that the mission of education is to communitize us as citizens. The rhetoric of liberal progress has traditionally encouraged us to believe that this process bears fruit. Have new rights for minorities not been secured, educational and economic opportunities opened up, public sensibility deepened? To the extent we believe we've come a long way, it is our liberal sense of community, ingrained in our educational and political discourse, that sustains us.

To understand the traditional appeal of the trope "community" for American educational institutions we need to note how tightly, in forming the basis of this trope, the ideology of democracy is yoked to a belief in cohesion through education. Historical studies of national literacy movements have amply shown that universal schooling is the most important underlying mechanism by which modern societies seek to create social cohesion.[3] Proponents of mass education in America traditionally believed in the capacity of education to harmonize and incorporate difference. Thus the history of public education in the United States--a oft- and well-told tale--bears eloquent witness to the efforts of American schooling to develop social cohesion. Thomas Jefferson maintained that though people have inalienable rights and an innate if sometimes debased

moral sense, no people could become a self-governing community without systematic nurture. Jefferson's emphasis on the American obligation to maintain political and social cohesion through education reverberates throughout nineteenth-century defenses of universal schooling. "Every child born into a community . . . [has] a natural right to be best education that community can furnish," asserts Orestes Brownson in an 1839 Boston Board of Education report, because (brushing up his Shakespeare) "a popular government unsupported by popular education is a baseless fabric" (Tozer 71).

The communitarian trope plays a shaping role in American educational thought. The celebratory rhetoric of community suffuses these public pronouncements of education's power to transform a heterogenous people into a nation. And, drawing directly upon this trope of communitarianism in educational discourse, justifications of group pedagogy reveal the same emphases. The goal of "civic education," says Sandra Stotsky, is to enact the "civic" or "communitarian ethic" by teaching "individual responsibility for the common good" and "participation in public life" (Stotsky 2).[4] "Teachers of academic writing" should do this, she maintains, by teaching their students "responsibilities . . . for both scholarship and citizenship in a republican form of government." (Stotsky 134). Teachers should insist that students "consider other writers as sincere as [themselves](138)," that they "create unambiguous texts" and "provide correct examples" (150-153), and that they "assume open-minded readers"(156). The school-marmish quality of these presumed values accurately conveys the traditional association between education and the shaping of an hypostatized community of willingly harmonized citizenry.

Other recent work has more subtly employed the same trope of community in rationalizing group pedagogy in writing. Gregory Clark argues that a democratic community must be grounded in a deliberate nurturing of collaborative "dialogue, dialectic, and conversation" by means of which "the knowledge that enables us to meet our common needs and reach our common goals" is constructed (68). To the extent that Clark valorizes the model of a liberal democracy as a community's highest aspiration, his justification stakes out political ground near to the realm of the moral: nothing less than our capacity to govern ourselves as a democratic nation is involved in the teaching of collaboration through

writing and reading. Invoking the terminology of a liberal democracy"--"democracy," "equality," "cooperation," "participation"--Clark asserts that writing teachers are central to the politics of equal participation: "[w]hen we teach our students that writing is a 'practice,' . . . we are teaching them that reading and writing as a democratic practice, one sustained by the skills and judgment that a rhetoric of public discourse provides" (68). Whereas Bruffee argues that the goal of collaboration is participation in a relatively restricted knowledge community, Clark describes collaboration's goal as an overtly political one: "a community of collaborating others provides the foundation upon which any democratic practice must be built" (70).

Gregory Clark's paean to writing as an instrument of "education that sustains collaboration in a community" (63) declares his loyalty to just that liberal version of community which is the chief target of political critiques of communal pedagogy. He outlines a traditionally liberal version of community in writing: the importance of all "dialogue" and "dialectic," he urges, is "to define and refine the shared knowledge that allows us to act cooperatively within a community" and "to assert that all people who participte in that process are political equals" (63). He emphasizes writing as political and social cooperation leading to "self-government": participants become "political equals who collaborate through their writing in the ongoing project of self-government" (63). Writing and reading are means by "which we participate with others in the ongoing process of constructing the knowledge that binds us together as a community." Citing Alystair McIntyre's work, he urges writing teachers to help students understand that "every text . . . contributes to the collaborative process through which the knowledge that constitutes the community" is developed (Clark 68).

Anne Ruggles Gere associates collaboration with an educated literacy, encouraging writing teachers to discover their responsibility for "initiating students into communities of educated people" (120). Her gloss on "community" shifts unpredictably, however: at one point she maintains that "writing groups offer a means for individuals . . . to enter literate communities" (121), while at another she defends writing groups as a means by which teachers can "help students into the literate community" of "a democracy"(122). Kenneth Bruffee offers a more stable and specific

reading of collaborative writing's goals. A nonfoundational epistemology, says Bruffee, is a positive basis for building "communities of like-minded peers" for whom collaborative writing and reading are strategies for building knowledge. But Bruffee's definitions of community, like Gere's, betray a certain ambiguity. The phrase "like-minded peers" carries a sharp double edge: like-mindedness implies excludes as powerfully as it includes. Just as learning groups offer participation and belonging, they also exclude all who don't know the special discourses necessary for membership. In a restrictive, knowledge-based concept of "community," exclusion is inclusion's dark twin.

This double-edged potential also lurks in the subtext of Kenneth Bruffee's recent book-length treatment of collaborative learning, in which he defines "community" as a collectivity of those trying to "become members of sophisticated, complex, highly literate communities" (115)--that is, trying to gain access to exclusive "knowlege communities" by learning its particular discourse. In this work Bruffee's choice of words again implies the binary potential of knowledge-based community-building. He advocates collaborative activity among students and teachers in order to create "conditions in which students can negotiate the boundaries between the knowledge communities they belong to and the one that the teacher belongs to" (124).

Another of Gere's claims on behalf of writing groups appeals to the same themes of the sociality of language and the power of community, but takes on a different ideological spin. She argues that group pedagogy reduces the alienation diagnosed by Marxian analysis as characterizing contemporary social relations. She maintains that the collective spirit of group collaboration counteracts the individualistic, alienating pressures of modern capitalist culture and its "solo-performer" tradition of writing: "[t]he enduring concept of alienation and the continuing struggle against it . . . provides a theoretical foundation for collaboration" (66). Group work puts writers into dynamic relationships with one another and with their audiences, emphasizing the "social relationships between writers and readers" (66) which fundamentally define the act of writing itself. As a result "collaboration ameliorates alienation by reorienting writers toward their readers"--not the implied readers of texts but the live readers of a collaborative group (68).

Ironically, it appears that these efforts to justify group pedagogy in terms of its power to shape community have made it most vulnerable to sharp critique.

CRITIQUES OF COMMUNITY IN WRITING

Whether justified from an epistemological, ethical or feminist perspective, the practices of communal pedagogy--sharing, collaboration, mutual responding--have been solidly established in American composition praxis. Regional and national meetings discuss its theory and practice, association, university and trade publishers bring out its titles, and most students in American colleges and universities encounter communal pedagogy. first--sometimes only--in writing courses. Its values of mutuality and collectivity seem transparent and beyond critique, for who could gainsay the importance of learning to work and share with others? The very terms seem trite and worn smooth with usage. LIke listening to the teacher and doing homework, sharing in groups speaks to the very deepest instincts of democratic education.

And here is just the difficulty: the liberal value of community ingrained in the American tradition of democratic schooling is, in its outcomes, suspiciously close to the cultural imperialism that those seeking a transformational pedagogy most oppose. Impatient voices from a different perspective find this a naive misunderstanding of the way to respond to a world beset with conflict, alienation and despair. In contemporary capitalist democracies, they point out, deep inequities of race, gender and class still exist. The public rhetoric of universal opportunity and entitlement cannot gainsay them. The world is fragmented into many contending voices which cannot be reconciled or communalized. Efforts to soften or harmonize competing voices of anger and frustration by invoking a wooly liberal vision of communal harmony just doesn't cut it.

Because discourse is power, membership in such a discourse community confers power and privilege. But when some of included, some are left out, thus unvoiced and disempowered. One of postmodernism's clearest tenets is the power of discourse to enact hegemony, to insist upon acquiesence to the dominant discourses of a culture and to exclude the

voices that are different or "other." This need to sponsor all voices in a community, to award privilege to the voices of difference, of the other is the primary point of critique by those arguing against traditional communal pedagogy in writng. Pat Bizzell has made this argument very cogently in several essays in recent years. She proposes that in the university the practice of community is inherently exclusionary because "students have a strong tendency either to conform totally to community expectations or to withdraw from the community entirely," so that in academia "community seems to be an utterance that helps middle-class teachers fend off criticism" than as a participatory or inclusionary experience (59-60). Because middle-class teachers tend to be ideology which constructs their viewpoints and informs their understandings, they wield power over students in ways that they do not understand. As a result, maintains James D. Williams, for instance, criticizes the pedagogical habit of trying to "validate the language and the nonacademic worlds of their students by bringing both into the classroom as the focus of study" as doing "little to modify the status of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds"(835).

This line of reasoning identifies a dark side of community, its power to exclude those not willing to be absorbed into its sanctioning ideologies and conventions. The overall effect of this critique is to posit oppositions between the asserted social conservatism--or coerciveness--of prevailing collaborative methods in writing pedagogy, and the social transformationalism that informs a genuinely liberating communal pedagogy. This opposition is captured in a series of antitheses which may be expressed as follows, complete with the special vocabulary of postmodern social critique:

- Present communal pedagogy imposes a hegemonic communalism; a liberatory pedagogy should seek a differentiated, contested pluralism.
- Present communal pedagogy teaches a passive liberal tolerance for difference; a liberatory pedagogy should encourage the active dialogical expression of difference.
- Present communal pedagogy emphasizes collaboration at the cost of difference.

- Present communal pedagogy represents an ideologically naive liberalism; a liberatory pedagogy requires an ideologically self-aware critique of community.

EFFORTS TO RESCUE COMMUNITY

The case has been made repeatedly in recent years that classroom community best develops from the process of knowledge-making itself. The "collaborative learning" model proposed by Kenneth Bruffee--perhaps the best-known advocate of classroom collaboration--appears at first glance to offer an attractive alternative to the problematic models discussed above. Avoiding ethical and political issues, Bruffee grounds his proposal in the epistemology of social construction, advocating "collaborative learning" based on "nonfoundational social construction" (3). Learning is "an interdependent, sociolinguistic process"(8), he says. Thus building knowledge is inherently social; what is "known" is by definition the result of interaction, through "negotiating with one another in communities of knowledgeable peers" (9). By "communities" Bruffee appears to mean both the classroom as a whole, and the small "consensus groups." It is the task of the consensus groups to reach agreement on tasks set by the teacher and report back to the whole class. Thus the teacher's managerial skills are crucial: if the teacher sets the stage properly and communicates her positive expectations: "skillfully managed classroom collaboration" will help students "enjoy the freedom to reinvent in the class the collaborative peership . . . [of] their everyday lives" (27).

The goal of both small-group work and whole-class discussion is to shape individuals into fit members of the discourse community embodied by the teacher. Students will be rewarded with a sense of belonging to "a new community," one which will provide "a powerful force changing" those who participate (20). Particpants must first "overcome resistance to change" generated by the desire to linger "at the boundaries of the knowledge communities that we already belong to"--that is, students will resist being changed (23-4). But the excitement of the process will carry its participants along, Bruffee urges:

if they persist, students will discover "the value, interest, and often in fact the excitement" of collaborative consensus-building (27). Conflict thus is represented as a temporary dysfunction within the communalizing body. If students can't "get along with others," then the teacher must remind students of group rules, must insist upon politeness, or perhaps revise group memberships to defuse problems, Bruffee advises.

This model of pedagogical community can hardly be acceptable to critics who distrust the dominance of teacherly discourse, for the goal of his collaboration is precisely to bring students into colleagueship with the teacher whose authority has not only gone unchallenged, but has been the source of goal-setting and discussion in the classroom. Greg Clark, in the article discussed above, critiques precisely this return to teacher-centered discourse: "the solution is not . . . simply to reconstruct the classroom as a collectivity of practitioners engaged in a common project . . . when the end of that project is expertise" ("Rescuing" 71). In Bruffee's acculturative process, "severing and weakening ties" with their old selves, students must become more like each other as they all become more like the teacher-master who rules the knowledge-group. "Difference," far from being preserved, must necessarily be diminished.

Is this rebuilding of student self-identity a laudable act of professionalization, or a sordid instance of academic oppression? The major problem with Bruffee's project, influential and attractive as it is, is that the ideological space it occupies is not clearly marked. Bruffee's definitions of community, like Gere's, betray a certain ambiguity. The phrase "like-minded peers" carries a sharp double edge: like-mindedness implies excludes as powerfully as it includes. In a restrictive, knowledge-based concept of "community," exclusion is inclusion's dark twin. Bruffee's collaborative knowledge-communities are certainly likely to exhibit the cohesion that flows from the goals and self-identities shaped by a complex knowledge-group--a connectedness that most teachers would be more inclined to nurture rather than to resist. The question would be whether this kind of cohesion stifles some element of diversity that, maintained and sharpened, might preserve different ways of knowing within a given learning community.

If the very essence of learning means gaining entry into certain knowledge groups, but if--at the same time--that entry diminishes racial, cultural and class difference, how is this apparent conflict to be dealt with? Is this basically a question of weighing loss against gain? Or is there a form of cohesion peculiar to collaborative learning groups that finesses this calculus, maintaining the integrity of difference while nurturing the collective enterprise of a particular knowledge field? Bruffee does not adequately address this issue.

A different epistemologically-grounded proposal comes from David Bleich, who maintains that building classroom collaboration is a purely "contingent" and "local" activity whose success depends upon the outcomes of "disclosure." Rather than focusing on ways of negotiating conflict, Bleich identifies collaborative self-disclosure as a unifying way of making knowledge together. Group members, he argues, must discover how to make knowledge out of self-revelation because "what each person brings to the classroom must become part of the curriculum for that course" (47). Building knowledge is a function of building selfhood within the group, where propositions cannot become objects of knowledge until they materialize from the self-disclosures of group members: "because each member of a classroom *actually has* an individual history, habitual and scholarly reference to it becomes part of the process of presenting opinions, interpretations, and reports of other things" (48). Group knowledge cannot be constructed unless members announce their "terms of membership" (48), because the kind of knowledge-making which becomes possible for the group depends upon the nature and extent of self-disclosure. No one form of knowledge is privileged over another by virtue of its being vested in the teacher or in those students more fluent and agile in a given knowledge area.

Thus the polarization and alienation of individuals in classroom groups, which Clark sees as requiring ethical and/or rhetorical mediation, are according to Bleich nipped early by epistemological acts of disclosure. Bleich envisions conflict as a predictable, manageable function of the stress of self-disclosure: "[t]he movements toward and away from others might then take on a rational character in contexts of disclosure, as the more private meanings of our movements become less

strange to others, more marked by others' sense of our own histories and cultures" (47), says Bleich. Conflict would develop and cohesion would develop as a function of the mutual recognition of disclosed individuality.

Bleich acknowledges that disclosure must be voluntary if the paradigm of cohesion he depicts is to be justified. However, the volutary, contingent nature of disclosure in this model leads quickly into a conceptual fault line, when reluctance and refusal are envisioned. Bleich cites an incident recorded by Leverentz (in her article cited above), in which a student attempting to impose traditional text-centered interpretations upon her collaborative group is undermined by a resistant fellow student, who wishes to "integrate accounts of lived experience into her critical commentaries and responses" (55). Bleich sees this maneuver as evidence of the power of student self-disclosure in the building of new knowledge. What it also suggests is the instability of the model of cohesion implicit in Bleich's proposal. For after an experience is "disclosed" there is nothing to prevent its being developed into divergent or oppositional perspectives. What if class members are not willing to disclose self at the price of its being challenged? What if class members find others's disclosures so disquieting to their own self-awareness (a distinct possibility in classrooms where gender and race are issues of "difference"), that they cannot continue their own disclosures or accept others'? The threat of intimacy and its impact on cohesion is not adequately accounted for in this model.

The pedagogy of disclosure seems well suited to an "outside" collective of--say--writers or others with voluntary purposes. Cohesion from a voluntarist group would grow naturally from its common goals and experiences. But this puts us right back to the beginning of our discussion, because the critiques with which we began assertively reject the notion of a voluntarily cohesive classroom. They postulate instead a differentiated group upon whose resistant separateness a specious cohesion is imposed by a hegemonic pedagogical context. So we end where we began, with the problem of finding a venue for a genuine experience of cohesion within the pedagogical structures of the university.

FEMINISM AND COMMUNITY

In contrast to these models of renewal in pedagogical community, the representation of such pedagogy by feminist theorists and researches exhibits a refreshing complexity and problematization. It is no coincidence that feminist scholars and teachers are most actively interrogating collaborative and group writing strategies today. That is because feminist theorizing about collaboration and community has strong affinities with the "cohesion paradigm" of community. Consequently, the complex and problematic outcomes of recent feminist studies of collaboration offer important insights into both the achievements and the problematics of collaborative pedagogy in writing today.

Feminists researchers have developed epistemological and ideological grounding for group writing practices, and found practical (though often problematic) success in collaborative praxis. Feminist theory plays a major role in grounding communal pedagogy, introducing ways of valuing coherence that problematize the issues of cohesion and difference. As some recent feminist work has shown, successful communal pedagogy requires cohesion *in order to be transformational* for the students of today in the classrooms of today. Such cohesion, which does not require that difference be resolved or integrated--is essential to the dynamics of any pedagogical community seeking a genuine contestation of issues.

Taking up the thesis of nonauthoritarian, noncompetitive behavior earlier articulated by Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky and her colleagues have offered writing teachers a new way of thinking about collaboration, proposing a dialogic pedagogy of collaboration intended as an alternative to more oppositional, argumentative models. Basing her observations on school and university practices, with students and faculty alike, Belenky and her colleagues pointed out that

> we pit students against one another; we teach competition; we create it . . . . We would have to spend any more energy teaching collaborative processes anc creating forms to support them than we do creating and teaching competitive processes . . . . When we do make the educational environment more collabortive, I think we'll *all* be happier in schools--men as well as women (282).

However, as Lester Faigley notes in his important study of postmodern movements in writing theory, feminist theory has split into a number of camps.[5] The emphasis upon cohesive, noncompetitive interaction is still influential in feminist thinking about writing and learning, but other voices argue that conflict within groups needs to be fully voiced and confronted. "In very real ways, our [writing] classrooms are sites of difference," say Julia M. Gergits and James J. Schramer, suggesting that writing classes are good testing grounds for evaluating efforts to encourage articulations of difference and the conflict that may accompany these efforts (189). Other feminist writers maintain that "substantive conflict during collaboration is not only normal, but also can be productive, in large part because it gives collaborators more time to generate and critically examine alternatives" (Burnett and Ewald 22).

But as Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede note about what they term the "dialogic" mode of collaborative work,

> "the roles enacted in it are fluid; one 'person' may occupy multiple and shifting roles as the project progresses. In this mode the process of articulating and working together to achieve goals is as important as the goals themselves. Those who participate in dialogic collaboration generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivalent ventures. In dialogic collaboration . . . group effort is seen as essential to the production . . . of knowledgeas as a means of individual satisfaction within the group" (36).

A number of recent efforts to explore the complex dynamic between collaboration and difference in pedagogical settings demonstrate how deeply embedded in American society are preferences for cooperation and community--thus how difficult it is to challenge students to devise a community based on resistance and difference. Feminist inquirers have repeatedly and thoughtfully probed this problematic dynamic, and their findings must be taken into account.

CONCLUSIONS

In the models of classroom community I have discussed, the proposers give thoughtful attention to the maintenance of cultural differences, the liberating impact of the decentered classroom, and the self-actualizing power of group participation. They value the power of group strategies in the English classroom to create equality and nurture learning. Some emphasize the primary importance of maintaining respect for difference; some focus on the common learning goals that should ground participation. However, the sources and nature of a cohesion that could keep classroom groups functioning while preserving diversity are not adequately discussed. My analysis of the assumptions and implications of each proposal suggests unavoidable discontinuities around this issue. Each proposal can be seen to gloss over, or double back on, one fundamental question: within a context of competing differences, out of what will cohesion actually arise? How can classroom communities cohere sufficiently to give its members satisfying experiences of commonality and interdependence?

I believe the most important finding here is that even thoughtful discussions of group formations run aground on the reefs of complexity and variety in English classroom groups. English classrooms can't be discussed as decision-making formations whose dynamics can be theorized in comfortably generic terms. Future discussions of groups in English classrooms must clarify how the groups are formed and structured, what specific goals are set for them, how the teacher interacts with them, what connections they have with the learning goals of the class, and what sorts of ethnic, culturual and socioeconomic variety are represented among class members.

How can students in a differentiated, pluralistic classroom be motivated to form a cohesive whole? It is clearly insufficient to reply that they simply must learn respect each others' differences and share common goals. That is simply rewriting the problem as the solution. Indeed, critics of existing classroom community models maintain that the obdurate forces of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic differences brought to the classroom profoundly resist democratization. So hegemonic is the middle-class bias of the professoriate and student majorities, suggest the critics, that they are incapable of truly making

space for such differences. If controlling majorities in the classroom want to enfold and co-opt difference, and if the diverse minorities resent and resist co-optation, then from whence will come the motivation to form cohesive groups?

Projects concerned with group pedagogy in the classroom must ask how cohesion itself is to be fostered and developed so that ethical choices can be identified and perhaps acted upon. Simply (though the projects I've been discussing are far from simple or superficial) identifying the ethical or rhetorical formulations by which good choices are to be made, is only part of the work that needs to be done. Thoughtful attention must be given to identifying how the dynamics of cohesion are to grow in a group of different, and differently motivated, students. Choice must itself be defined: how are ethical actions to be willed, adopted for oneself? What state of mind must be developed so that students will want to be ethical? What motivations in classroom groups best predispose students to participate, share and yield?

It is essential to develop a more comprehensive model of the impact of learning goals upon cohesion in the English classroom. More perhaps than classroom groups in any other discipline, English classrooms groups enact multiple learning purposes. Students in writing classes, discussing each others' work and each others' interpretations, are likely to combine increasing recognition of discourse possibilities with discovery of their own and peers' attitudes and judgments--that is, combine structured field knowledge with personal identity-making. Future models of classroom groups in English need to accommodate this inherently broad range of learning opportunities if they are to speak to the immense potential of such groups.

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[1] See Anne Ruggles Gere, Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1987); Karen Burke Lefevre's *Invention as a Social Act* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); David Bleich's *The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy, and Social Relations* (New, York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Karen Spear's *Sharing Writing: Peer Response Groups in English Classes* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Boynton Cook, 1988); Gregory Clark's *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); and Kenneth Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning: Higher*

Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[2] The most comprehensive critiques are in are Patricia Harkin's and John Schilb's *Contending With Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age* (MLA 1991) and Richard Bullock's and John Trimbur's *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary* (Boynton/Cook 1991).

[3] See Harvey Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), Parts Three and Four; Christopher J. Lucas, *Our Western Educational Heritage* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), Chaps. 7 and 8; and Clarence J. Karier, *The Individual, Society,* and Education (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

[4] The venue of this work and its author suggest the ethos of educational authority in which it participates. Stotsky's work has been done at Harvard; the book is published by the Teachers College Press of Columbia University; and Stotsky is the editor of *Research in the Teaching of English.*

[5] Faigley notes this process connecting with the "expressivism" of Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, aligning their emphasis upon student collaboration with feminist interest in noncompetitive learning, and identifies feminists like Susan Jarratt as seeing the need to assign some responsibility for confronting difference in any collaborative process.

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